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# THE BOOK OF THE MONTH

## MORE DISCUSSION OF NEW TESTAMENT ESCHATOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

SHAILER MATHEWS

The Hulsean prize essay for 1908 was won by E. C. Dewick, M.A., tutor and dean of St. Aidan's, Birkenhead. Its subject, Primitive Christian Eschatology, is immediately in the public eye, and the book covers a field in which there was a distinct lack in English theological literature. It falls into six parts dealing respectively with the eschatology of the Old Testament, of the Jewish apocalypses, of Jesus, of the apostles, of the sub-apostolic church, and, by way of summary, of the evidential value of primitive Christian eschatology. It is marked by a good knowledge of the original material and naturally has the advantage of treating its subject broadly rather than intensively.

The volume is marked by original work, but by surprising neglect of literature. While it is probably too much to expect that an Englishman could remember that there is work being done in the field of the messianic hope in America, it is certainly amazing to find practically no reference to any German work in the entire volume except to translations of Harnack and Schweitzer.

It is not at all surprising, therefore, that in a work which has neglected some of the most searching studies of the elements of its problem the discussions of the historical-religious school should be all but unmentioned. At the same time the author is to be commended for setting forth with considerable fulness his own studies of the material of the Jewish apocalypses. The chief criticism to be passed upon the entire treatment of the parts dealing with this material

is that there is no historical evaluation and a failure to appreciate exactly what the apocalyptists were endeavoring to do. Any man who studies the apocalypses of Judaism should bear in mind that they are concerned with a definite national hope and that their figures of speech and their various symbols are, after all, entirely subordinate to passionate hope. Thus there is altogether too little historical estimate in what is otherwise a very good encyclopedic account of the content of the literature. In his discussion of Christ's eschatology one feels the impression of original work, but a failure to appreciate the heart of the problem itself.

The author very properly declares that the question as to whether Jesus believed the kingdom of God was eschatological is a most momentous question. One would expect that in a discussion of this matter there would have been a thoroughgoing critical examination of the material. The questions, for example, as to how far Jesus made use of the "two ages," and how far the eschatology of the Apostolic Age has read back into the ages, cannot be answered until there is a scientific recovery of what Jesus rather than the evangelists actually taught.

The absence of definite historical method is to be seen in the fact that the author cannot find in Christ's use of the term "kingdom" any single meaning. Such a failure is latent in any unhistorical approach to New Testament interpretation.

The author's discussion of the eschatological school is confined to a few pages which seem like a sort of addition to an

<sup>1</sup> *Primitive Christian Eschatology, the Hulsean Prize Essay for 1908.* By E. C. Dewick. Cambridge University Press, 1912. Pp. xx+416. 10s. 6d. net.

original discussion. Here, although a more precise evaluation of the messianic conception is needed, he cannot escape the influence of his material, and accordingly when he summarizes the teaching of Jesus, although he disagrees with what he calls the consistent eschatological theory, he does hold to a sort of inconsistent eschatological theory. He very properly criticizes the excessively logical rigor of Schweitzer, but, at the same time, leaves his own work open to criticism to the effect that he is endeavoring to conform to a dogmatic presupposition. The consistent eschatological theory, if substantial, would seriously undermine the foundations of conventional Christianity, but such a norm is dogmatic rather than historical.

The first duty of the student of eschatology of the New Testament is to discover exactly what our sources lead us to believe Jesus taught. Professor Dewick recognizes the fact that Jesus possibly started with the eschatological point of view, but when he passes to the discussion of the evidential value of that eschatology he at once abandons anything like an objective, historical method. The one essential truth of Christianity he holds lies in the Catholic doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ as

perfect God and perfect man. To this he holds that the subject of primitive Christian eschatology presents no insuperable obstacles and may, indeed, strengthen our loyalty to this doctrine. Here again we have a dogmatic rather than historical interest.

Altogether the volume is an illustration of a class of work which we have come to expect from too many English theologians. Modern study works only superficial modification of their views and seldom leads to the adoption of a definite method of approach to problems. The study of origins is with them a phase of apologetics and there is little willingness to adopt methods or conclusions which do not in some way give evidential support to orthodoxy.

There is good scholarship in this volume in the sense that its author has become acquainted with much original material, but there is a lack of genuine historical method. There is still room for a critical study of messianism. Charles has given us much material and the rapidly growing school of German and American specialists are giving us method, but the author of the volume evidently knows little of these studies at first hand and cannot be said to have added to our knowledge on the subject.

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## BOOK NOTICES

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**What is the Truth About Jesus Christ.** Problems of Christology discussed in six Haskell Lectures. By Friedrich Loofs. New York: Scribner, 1913. vii+241 pages. \$1.25 net.

A most interesting little volume is this book of six lectures given at Oberlin by Professor Loofs. Theologically Professor Loofs is conservative among Germans, although he would probably be regarded as anything but conservative by orthodox Christians. In these lectures he discusses with more detail than seems justified the position taken by Drews and W. B. Smith, but he is too much of a historian not to see that

their position is really an exaggeration of something of importance, viz., that the truly historical Jesus is the Jesus who was able to accomplish what he has accomplished. In history, as he says (p. 159), "science cannot do justice to the sources with its assumption that the life of Jesus was a purely human life," yet he does not believe that the Christology of the church is tenable. As a historian of the first class his chapter on this point carries great weight. He does not hold that it is necessary to believe in the doctrine of the Virgin birth, and at five points he holds that orthodox Christology does not agree with the New Testament: (1) in that it holds that